



World number one Victoria Azarenka of Belarus poses with the trophy after beating Samantha Stosur of Australia in the Qatar Open final in Doha on Sunday.

Fed's fourth on the trot

AFP, Rotterdam

Top seed Roger Federer won a fourth successive indoor title, and his 71st career crown, when he hammered Argentine Juan Martin del Potro 6-1, 6-4 to win his second Rotterdam Open on Sunday.

Federer had ended 2011 with a hat-trick of trophies in Basel, Paris and London before picking up this week where he left off in the Dutch city seven years ago where he won his first Rotterdam event.

"Even if I had a good indoor season last year, this is a great start. It was tough to come back and play Davis Cup and here, but I did it," he said.

"I also managed to stay positive after the Davis Cup loss, which was important for me. This court feels like home to me," added the 30-year-old, who was part of the Swiss team defeated 5-0 by the United States last weekend.

The victory took Federer's record against del Potro to 9-2, with the Swiss winning three of four in the series after losing the 2009 US Open final to the South American.

Federer, a 16-time Grand Slam winner, has now assured himself of a 12th consecutive year in which he has won at least one ATP title.

"It's incredible that it took me seven years to come back and defend my title, I hope the next time it not so long. But if it is, then it means I'll be playing for another seven years," joked Federer, who saved all seven break points he faced in a reassuring 88-minute victory.

Federer stormed into a 5-0 lead, with del Potro finally troubling his Swiss rival after 28 minutes when he rallied for 1-5.

But Federer maintained his red-hot form to sweep the set in 33 minutes.

Del Potro's resistance stiffened in the second, with Federer saving break points in the fourth, sixth and eighth games.

"I just tried to stay in the point and not make mistakes. I kept this mindset throughout the match and it really helped," said Federer. "I may have won the first set easy, but of course I knew that the second would not be as easy. I had to fight but I fought well. I tried to move forward against him and change the angle, the rhythm and the speed of the shot."

India's vital

FROM PAGE 16 Parthiv Patel would get his first game as a wicketkeeper in the side, but Indians would still have to make a choice about the batsman to leave out.

They would surely recall Ravichandran Ashwin who has bagged all his five wickets in the triangular series against the Lankans for impressive figures of three for 32 and two for 30.

Azarenka on a roll

Tennis

AFP, Doha

Victoria Azarenka extended her domination over Samantha Stosur to win her third successive title of the year at the WTA Qatar Open on Sunday, taking her 2012 record to 17 straight wins.

The Belarusian world number one showed no signs of discomfort from her overnight injury scare in the semifinals against Agnieszka Radwanska by beating a listless Stosur, the US Open champion, 6-1, 6-2 in a one-sided final.

The Qatar Open was Azarenka's 11th title, 10 of them coming on hard courts, as she maintained her perfect record against the Australian who she has beaten in five career clashes beginning in 2008, with none of the matches going to three sets.

Sunday's win also completed a remarkable 12 months for Azarenka who lost to Daniela Hantuchova in the first round in Doha in 2011, a defeat that led her to contemplate retirement before being talked out of it by her mother and grandmother.

"I am really proud of the way I played today," said Azarenka, fighting back tears.

"I was not 100 per cent after my fall yesterday and I knew I had to adjust my game and everything went according to plan."

Stosur, who was playing her first final of the year, was bidding for her fourth title, but Azarenka was too good for the world number

five despite rarely hitting top gear.

The Australian Open champion broke Stosur in the third game of the first set from 40-all when the Aussie hit a ball long and then netted an easy volley.

Stosur again made crucial unforced errors in her next service game, putting a forehand into the net and then missing an easy smash before a powerful forehand return fetched Azarenka her second break.

The Belarusian then retained her serve to lead 5-1 and, following another error-ridden service game by Stosur, clinched the set with a fine volley.

The second set was also played along the same pattern as Stosur failed to reduce her errors and soon Azarenka had taken a stranglehold on the match by racing to a 3-0 lead.

And although the Australian managed to win two service games, Azarenka then broke her again in the eighth game to maintain a hundred per cent record in finals this year.

"Last year I lost in the first round and watched someone else lift this beautiful trophy," Azarenka said. "But now I have this for myself."

Stosur was happy after making her first final of the year.

"It's been great to be able to turn around my form so quickly after a disappointing month first up, so I'm really pleased that I have been able to pick it up and make it to the final," she said.

"As far as tonight goes, I think she played very well, very solid, as usual."

Sachin best batter again

Cricket

PTI, New Delhi

Iconic Indian cricketer Sachin Tendulkar has bagged the fifth ESPNcricinfo best batting performance award in Tests beating the likes of his compatriot Rahul Dravid and Australian skipper Michael Clarke.

Tendulkar, whose 146 in Cape Town in 2011 came in testing conditions and in the face of some sublime swing bowling by Dale Steyn, became the No. 1 choice of seven jurors out of the 11 who had him in their top three.

The Test batting category had the widest gap between the winner and number two position -- six points separated Tendulkar's innings from Michael Clarke's 151, also scored in Cape Town in the Test in which Australia dismissed South Africa for 96 and were then bowled out in their second innings for 47.

It was Tendulkar's second ESPNcricinfo Award. He had won the ODI batting performance in 2009 for his 175 against Australia in Hyderabad.

Meanwhile, Doug Bracewell won the Test bowling award.

Bracewell has won this in his debut year in international cricket for his six for 40 in New Zealand's historic seven-run win against Australia in Hobart.

Another first for the awards was the victory of an Associate player -- Kevin O'Brien, who got votes from 13 out of a panel of 16 jurors, for his nerveless century in Ireland's historic win over England in the World Cup.

The ODI bowling award was given to Mitchell Johnson for his six-wicket haul in Lillekele during Australia's tour to Sri Lanka.

The awards were decided by a 16-member jury that included former players Ian Chappell, Ian Bishop, Ramiz Raja, Kepler Wessels, Geoff Boycott, Martin Crowe, Sanjay Manjrekar and Russel Arnold, and ESPNcricinfo's senior writers.

The jurors were asked to pick their top three performances in each category from a shortlist of nominees.

Former Aussie captain Chappell said Tendulkar showed true class during his 146.

"He faced 314 balls which is not Tendulkar-like, the strike rate, but these were precious runs. This was another side of Tendulkar, just showing his greatness -- his ability to make runs when things were really tough, and he really had to battle," said Chappell.

Khulna

FROM PAGE 16 the exception of Jason Roy, who fell to a run-out after making a 24-ball 30 with two fours and as many sixes.

Earlier, the Chittagong bowlers continued their impressive form to restrict Khulna to 137 runs.

Khulna could manage a decent total thanks to Nasir Hossain, the highest-paid player in the BPL auction, who made team highest 42 off 38 balls that contained four boundaries and a six.

Left-arm spinner Enamul Haque was the most successful Chittagong bowler with three wickets for 22 runs.

SCORES IN BRIEF

KHULNA: 137 for 6 in 20 overs (Gibbs 20, Smith 17, Shakib 14, Nasir 42, Russell 16 not out; Cooper 2-24, Enamul 3-22)

CHITTAGONG: 93 all out in 18.1 overs (Roy 30, Riyad 12, Arafat 12 not out; Marshal Ayub 4-20, Smith 2-14, Razzak 2-13)
Result: Khulna Royal Bengals won by 44 runs.

Man-of-the-match: Nasir Hossain.

End of Ricky in ODIs?

Cricket

AFP, Sydney

World Cup winner Ricky Ponting's one-day international career appeared over Monday after he was dropped from Australia's team after a dismal run of form, and was considering his future in the game.

Chief selector John Inverarity announced the axing of Ponting, the second all-time leading run-scorer in ODIs, after he scored just 18 runs in five tri-series knocks against India and Sri Lanka.

"Ricky Ponting has been dropped from the [ODI] squad due to his lack of form in the five tri-series matches to date," Inverarity said.

Briefing reporters in Perth, Inverarity also said there were no guarantees Ponting would continue playing Test cricket, and that the former captain was pondering his next steps.

"Ricky is going to consider his future over the next couple of days and he'll talk it over with his family and with his manager, and my guess is he'll be giving a press conference in the next two or three days," he said.

Ponting was expected to hold a press conference to outline his future in Sydney on Tuesday, according to sources at Cricket Australia.

Ponting, 37, said earlier that he wanted to battle through his current

slump. He has averaged just 3.60 in his five tri-series innings.

But Inverarity, while praising Ponting's contribution over a glittering 17-year ODI career, seemed to shut the door on any future for the veteran in Australia's one-day side.

"The team will not seem the same without him, but moving on from the omission of players who have been outstanding over a long period of time is the nature of elite sport," he said.

"He made a double century in his last Test match and we are hoping that he remains available for Test match cricket, but there can be no guarantees in elite sport and in the Australian cricket team."

Inverarity added: "If he drops out of the ODI team then there's a possible lack of momentum there."

"There are three Test matches in the West Indies [in April], then as I understand it there are no more Test matches until October or November."

The selectors dumped Ponting as they announced a 13-man squad with all-rounder Shane Watson returning for Australia's next two tri-series ODIs, against Sri Lanka in Hobart on Friday and India in Sydney next Sunday.

Ponting's sacking came a day after he led Australia to a crushing 110-run win over India in Brisbane as stand-in for injured skipper Michael Clarke. But while the other batsmen made merry, he scored just seven runs from 26 balls.

Ponting said after Sunday's victory that he had no intention of seeking a rest to freshen up.

"It's fair to say I've struggled in the first five games," he told reporters.

"I'm not going to put my hand up and say I want a break, because when you are going through a lean trot like I've had the last couple of games, you want to turn that around."

Ponting ranks second only to India's Sachin Tendulkar with most ODI runs (13,704) from 375 matches, while he has scored 13,200 runs in 162 Tests.

"Ricky's record speaks for itself," Inverarity said.

"He is one of the truly great performers in the history of Australian ODI cricket, with his reputation enhanced further by him captaining Australia to two World Cup victories."

Inverarity said that Ponting's contribution to the Australia ODI team went far beyond his batting statistics and brilliant fielding.

"The example he sets in every respect and his extraordinarily positive influence in the dressing-room is acknowledged by all," he said, while hailing Ponting's "selfless" willingness to stand in for Clarke recently.

Ponting's sacking comes less than a month after his dominant role in Australia's 4-0 clean sweep of the home Test series against India.

He was second for most series runs only to Clarke, scoring 544 at 108.80 with two centuries and three 50s.

Redemption Rahmatganj

FROM PAGE 16 Sheikh Jamal mustered their only shot on target two minutes before the breather when Kester Akon flicked one at the near post but Rahmatganj goalkeeper Sujan Chowdhury was up to the task.

After the resumption, Rahmatganj pressed hard and had two chances of breaking the deadlock and both fell to Nigerian striker Lucky who spurned both chances by hesitating to take a shot before the opposition defenders rushed in to clear the danger.

But Idris made sure that the persistent pressure counted as he found the back

of the net on the 63rd minute with a well-judged header from a chaotic situation at the Sheikh Jamal goal mouth.

Two minutes later, Aminul made two brilliant saves to deprive Rahmatganj from extending their lead but the former national goalkeeper had to leave the field with his bowed.

"The boys were asked to restore the tarnished image of the club by winning this match against the club we lost in a different circumstance last season. I am happy the boys kept the faith of the team management," said Rahmatganj MFS coach Mahmudur Rahman Liton.

Kvitova still ill at ease

AFP, Dubai

Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova's hope of challenging for the world number one spot took another blow when she was forced to retire for a second tournament in a row.

The fierce-hitting left-hander from the Czech Republic has decided she had not recovered sufficiently from a virus to compete at the Dubai Open, starting here Monday.

Kvitova also withdrew from last week's Qatar Open in Doha, and is likely to remain in Prague until shortly before she competes again, probably at Indian Wells in the first week in March.



PHOTO: COURTESY

Players and officials of Apollo Hospitals pose for photographs on the opening day of the six-a-side inter-department cricket tournament that will continue till February 24 at the Udayachal Club playground in Mohammadpur.

CROSSWORD By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

- 1 Level in a hierarchy
5 Lower limb
8 Tranquil
12 Burn soother
13 Hockey surface
14 Hodge-podge
15 Road on a cliff's face
17 Nevada city
18 Greek vowel
19 Carnival venue
20 Beginning
21 Private place to sleep?
22 Compete
23 Cookwear?
26 Guys
30 Back
31 Chicken —
32 Concept
33 Current generator for some engines
35 Confuse
36 A Gabor
37 Ph. bk. data

- 38 Wooden box
41 Ultra-modernist
42 Periodical, for short
45 Stereo setup
46 City in Ontario
48 "Oh, woe!"
49 Pt. of speech
50 Therefore
51 Impudent
52 Spelling contest
53 Physical
DOWN
1 Compete on a track
2 Greatly
3 Mrs. Nick Charles
4 Documentary filmmaker Burns
5 Within the law
6 Reverberate
7 "Golly!"
8 Roddy McDowall's "Planet of the Apes" role
9 Brewery products
10 Queue
11 Academic
16 Press
20 Lubricate
21 Musician in the brass section

Solution time: 21 mins.

LAB	DOC	QUAD
IRAQ	AFPE	USSR
MENU	BEL	EASY
EAGER	DEBT	
SOW	BAZAAR	
BLITZEN	HALVE	
LOCI	DEP	LOON
ABOOK	CUE	DESCEND
BOONNET	ZOO	
MYRA	BASIC	
IOWA	AGE	TODD
CHAR	CUE	LULL
YORK	KEN	PEA

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CRYPTOQUIP

K O L K Z Q F S E L H Q H R S E V Q K T R

X L E K T A L K V D L F S H Z L

V G V Q D L A V Q C Z L X T ,

K O T A T ' E H G R L A K L C G Q K S K !

Yesterday's Cryptoquip: POPULAR BEATLES

SONG CONCERNING THE PROPER PULSATING

FUNCTION OF THE HEART: "LET IT BEAT"

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: S equals I